Reconciling Faith: New Covenant Christianity and the Rejection of Old Testament Violence

Douglas C. Youvan

doug@youvan.com

October 19, 2024

Throughout the Christian tradition, believers have grappled with how to reconcile the violent stories of the Old Testament with the message of love, peace, and grace that defines the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. One such story is the binding of Isaac, where Abraham is commanded to sacrifice his son. For many modern Christians, particularly those who follow *New Covenant theology*, this story and others like it present profound moral and theological challenges. How can a loving God demand such violence, and how should these stories be understood in light of Jesus' teachings of nonviolence and forgiveness? This article explores how New Covenant Christians approach these difficult Old Testament narratives, reinterpreting them through the lens of love, grace, and the radical message of Jesus. By focusing on the fulfillment of the law in Christ, they seek to honor the entire Bible while rejecting the acceptance of violence in favor of a faith rooted in compassion and peace.

Keywords: New Covenant Christianity, Old Testament violence, binding of Isaac, Jesus’ teachings, nonviolence, love and grace, Abraham, allegorical interpretation, Sermon on the Mount, faith and reconciliation.

Introduction:

Throughout history, Christians have approached the Bible in diverse ways, reflecting different theological perspectives and interpretations of Scripture. While many Christians view the entire Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, as a unified revelation of God's plan, others take a more selective approach, particularly when grappling with difficult or troubling passages in the Old Testament. Some stories, especially those involving violence, divine wrath, or practices that seem contrary to the values of love and mercy emphasized by Jesus, raise profound ethical and spiritual questions. Among those who wrestle with such narratives are *New Covenant Christians*, who focus primarily on the teachings of Jesus and the writings of Paul in the New Testament, believing that these teachings represent a new and final covenant between God and humanity.

One of the most well-known and challenging Old Testament stories is the *binding of Isaac*, also known as the *Akedah* (Genesis 22). In this narrative, Abraham, the father of the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic faiths, is commanded by God to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering. Isaac, long awaited and beloved, was the child through whom God had promised Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars (Genesis 15:5). Abraham's obedience in preparing to sacrifice Isaac, only to be stopped by an angel at the last moment, has been interpreted as a profound act of faith and trust in God. However, the story raises unsettling questions for many Christians, particularly those who struggle to understand why a loving and merciful God would ask a father to sacrifice his son. The violent and sacrificial nature of the command makes it difficult for some to reconcile this story with the message of love, grace, and peace found in the teachings of Jesus.

For *New Covenant Christians*, this tension is especially pronounced. These Christians interpret the Bible through the lens of the *New Covenant*—a term referring to the new relationship between God and humanity established through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. New Covenant theology emphasizes the idea that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament laws and prophecies, rendering some of the legal and ritual practices of the Old Testament obsolete (Matthew 5:17). As a result, New Covenant Christians prioritize the teachings of Jesus and the apostle Paul, particularly focusing on themes of love, forgiveness,

and grace, over the more complex and often harsher narratives of the Old Testament.

This approach can lead to a selective reading of Scripture, where certain Old Testament stories, especially those involving violence or divine wrath, are either rejected, reinterpreted, or viewed as metaphorical rather than literal. The binding of Isaac, for example, may be seen as a story that reflects an ancient context of sacrifice and obedience but is no longer relevant or necessary for understanding God's nature in the light of the New Covenant. Instead, New Covenant Christians focus on the radical message of love that Jesus proclaimed in the Gospels, where God is portrayed as a loving Father who desires mercy rather than sacrifice (Matthew 9:13) and calls for peacemaking and nonviolence.

In this article, we will explore how New Covenant Christians navigate stories like the binding of Isaac, why they choose to focus on the teachings of Jesus and Paul, and how they reconcile difficult Old Testament passages with their faith in a God of love and grace. By understanding their approach, we can gain insights into the diverse ways Christians interpret Scripture and how these interpretations shape their understanding of God, faith, and moral responsibility.

1. The Story of Isaac and Its Theological Challenges

The story of *Abraham's binding of Isaac*, found in Genesis 22, is one of the most dramatic and complex narratives in the Bible. It begins with a divine command that seems unthinkable to modern sensibilities: God tells Abraham, the patriarch of the faith, to take his son Isaac to the region of Moriah and offer him as a burnt sacrifice. This command is especially poignant because Isaac is not just any child—he is the long-promised son through whom God had pledged to make Abraham the father of a great nation. After years of waiting for a child, Abraham and his wife Sarah were given Isaac in their old age as a fulfillment of God's covenant (Genesis 21:1-3). Thus, the command to sacrifice Isaac strikes at the very heart of Abraham's faith and trust in God's promises.

In response to this command, Abraham prepares to obey without hesitation. Early in the morning, he takes Isaac, along with wood for the fire, and journeys to the mountain that God had shown him. Along the way, Isaac, unaware of the

impending sacrifice, innocently asks his father, “Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” (Genesis 22:7). Abraham replies, “God himself will provide the lamb” (Genesis 22:8), a statement loaded with both faith and uncertainty. When they reach the designated place, Abraham binds Isaac, lays him on the altar, and raises the knife to kill his son. At the last moment, an angel of the Lord calls out to stop Abraham, and God provides a ram caught in a thicket to be sacrificed in Isaac’s place. The story concludes with God reaffirming His covenant with Abraham, praising his faith and obedience (Genesis 22:12-18).

While this narrative has been traditionally interpreted as a supreme test of Abraham’s faith and trust in God, it poses significant theological challenges, especially for modern readers. Many Christians, particularly *New Covenant Christians*, find the story of Isaac’s near-sacrifice violent and morally problematic. The image of a father being asked to kill his son as a demonstration of faith strikes at the core of parental love and human morality. The command seems at odds with the loving and merciful God that Jesus reveals in the New Testament. For these Christians, the idea of God asking for such a brutal sacrifice—even as a test—raises troubling questions about the nature of God and the ethical implications of blind obedience to divine commands.

1.1. The Moral Dilemma: Violence and Human Sacrifice

One of the primary reasons many Christians struggle with the story is its apparent endorsement of human sacrifice, a practice widely condemned in later parts of the Bible. In the Old Testament itself, human sacrifice is explicitly forbidden (Deuteronomy 12:31; Leviticus 18:21), and the God of Israel is portrayed as abhorring the ritual killing of humans, which was common among surrounding pagan cultures. Yet, in this story, God appears to command just that—without explanation. The story can be interpreted as setting up a disturbing precedent: God requires unquestioning obedience, even when it means sacrificing innocent life. For modern readers, especially those who focus on the ethical teachings of Jesus, this presents a profound moral conflict. How can a God of love demand such a violent and seemingly unethical act?

Moreover, many Christians view the story through the lens of Jesus’ teachings, which emphasize compassion, mercy, and nonviolence. Jesus himself proclaimed, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Matthew 9:13), directly challenging the idea that

God would require a physical sacrifice to demonstrate faith. For New Covenant Christians, who prioritize Jesus' message of love and peace, the story of Isaac feels inconsistent with the character of God as revealed in the New Testament. Jesus called for the protection of the innocent, the welcoming of children, and the condemnation of those who would cause harm to the least among them (Matthew 18:6). These teachings make the story of Isaac particularly hard to reconcile with a God who supposedly desires the flourishing of life, not its destruction.

1.2. Theological Challenges: Obedience Versus Mercy

Another key issue in the story is the theme of obedience. Abraham's unquestioning willingness to sacrifice Isaac is often celebrated as the ultimate act of faith, but for many modern Christians, this blind obedience is troubling. If God's commands appear to contradict basic human moral instincts—such as the instinct to protect one's child—how should a believer respond? Should faith require the suspension of ethical reasoning? This question is central to the way many Christians interpret the story today.

New Covenant Christians, in particular, may argue that Jesus' teachings encourage believers to prioritize love, mercy, and justice over rigid obedience to commands that seem harmful or contradictory. Jesus repeatedly challenged the religious authorities of his day for their legalistic approach to the law, urging them to focus on the deeper principles of love and compassion. For example, when asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. … And love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39). This radical emphasis on love as the foundation of the law contrasts sharply with the notion of sacrificing a loved one to prove faithfulness.

1.3. Struggling to Reconcile the God of Genesis with the God of the Gospels

For many modern Christians, especially those influenced by *New Covenant theology*, the story of Isaac presents a theological tension between the God of the Old Testament and the God revealed in the Gospels. The God who asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac seems to reflect an older, more authoritarian view of divinity—one in which obedience and fear of God are paramount. In contrast, the God revealed in Jesus Christ is a loving, compassionate Father who values mercy,

forgiveness, and the well-being of His children. The message of the New Testament seems to be that God does not require violent acts of sacrifice to prove faith but desires a personal, loving relationship with humanity.

This tension leads some New Covenant Christians to reinterpret or reject certain Old Testament stories, like the binding of Isaac, viewing them as allegorical or culturally bound rather than literal commands from God. They argue that these stories reflect the ancient worldview of a people still coming to understand God's true nature, which is fully revealed only in Jesus. Rather than seeing the story as a model of faith to be emulated, these Christians may view it as a story that points to the limitations of early human understanding of God, with the New Covenant revealing a more complete and loving picture of God's will for humanity.

In conclusion, the story of Isaac's near-sacrifice presents significant theological challenges for Christians today. Its themes of violence, sacrifice, and blind obedience clash with the teachings of Jesus and Paul, who emphasize love, grace, and mercy as the foundation of faith. For New Covenant Christians, these challenges lead to a reevaluation of how to interpret the story, focusing instead on the God of the New Testament who desires compassion and life rather than sacrifice and death.

2. New Covenant Christianity: Prioritizing the Message of Jesus

New Covenant Christianity refers to a theological perspective within the broader Christian tradition that emphasizes the New Testament as the primary source of faith, understanding, and practice. These Christians believe that the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ established a *new covenant* between God and humanity, which fulfills and supersedes the Old Testament covenant, particularly the legal and ritual laws given to the Israelites. In this view, Jesus' teachings represent a higher and more complete revelation of God's will for humanity, and his message of love, peace, and grace is seen as the foundation of the Christian faith.

New Covenant Christians focus on the idea that through Jesus, God has established a new way of relating to His people—one that is based on grace and faith, rather than adherence to the strict laws and sacrificial practices of the Old

Testament. They prioritize the New Testament, particularly the Gospels and the letters of Paul, viewing these writings as the clearest expression of God's intentions for humanity. While they do not necessarily reject the Old Testament entirely, they often see its laws and stories as either symbolic or as having been fulfilled by Jesus, no longer binding for believers under the New Covenant.

2.1. The Life and Teachings of Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Old Testament

At the heart of New Covenant Christianity is the belief that Jesus' life and teachings fulfill the Old Testament's prophecies and promises. Jesus himself, in the Sermon on the Mount, said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17). This statement is key for New Covenant Christians, who see the entire Old Testament—its laws, prophecies, and stories—as pointing toward and being completed in Jesus.

Jesus' message fundamentally transformed the way many Christians understand God's relationship with humanity. Central to his teaching is the call to love God and love one's neighbor, which Jesus declares as the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36-40). This command to love is seen as the essence of the New Covenant, replacing the older covenant's focus on ritual purity, sacrifices, and legal adherence. Jesus emphasized mercy, forgiveness, and nonviolence, teaching that God's kingdom is characterized not by power or law but by peace, humility, and love.

For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reverses many common understandings of righteousness, calling for his followers to love their enemies, turn the other cheek, and bless those who persecute them (Matthew 5:38-44). These teachings, which promote nonviolence and radical forgiveness, are seen as a contrast to the often harsh and violent narratives of the Old Testament. New Covenant Christians view this as a critical shift—God is no longer requiring sacrifices or the strict enforcement of the law but is instead calling people to a higher standard of love and grace.

Jesus' rejection of violence and sacrificial practices is also reflected in his actions. When confronted with situations where the Old Testament law would call for punishment, such as the case of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), Jesus extends mercy, refusing to condemn her and offering forgiveness instead.

For New Covenant Christians, this moment illustrates how Jesus' teachings diverge from the legalistic and often punitive aspects of the Old Testament and establish a new way of living based on grace and compassion.

2.2. Paul's Support of the New Covenant Focus: Grace, Salvation, and Love

The apostle Paul plays a central role in articulating and expanding the theology of the New Covenant. In his letters, Paul repeatedly emphasizes that the coming of Jesus has inaugurated a new era in which believers are no longer bound by the Old Testament law. In Romans 10:4, Paul states, "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." For Paul, the law served its purpose in preparing the way for Christ, but now that Jesus has come, salvation and righteousness are attained not through legal observance but through faith in Jesus Christ.

One of Paul's core teachings is the idea of *justification by faith*. In his letter to the Romans, Paul argues that human beings are justified—made right with God—not by works of the law but by faith in Jesus (Romans 3:28). This teaching stands in contrast to the Old Testament, where adherence to the law was seen as the means to righteousness. For New Covenant Christians, Paul's emphasis on faith reflects the essence of the new relationship God has established with humanity: one based on trust in God's grace rather than on human efforts to follow the law perfectly.

Paul also stresses that the New Covenant is characterized by the central Christian virtue of love. In 1 Corinthians 13, often called the "Love Chapter," Paul famously declares that love is greater than all other spiritual gifts, stating, "And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13). This prioritization of love aligns with Jesus' teaching that love is the fulfillment of the law (Matthew 22:37-40). For New Covenant Christians, love becomes the guiding principle of faith and practice, surpassing the older rules and regulations of the Mosaic Law.

Additionally, Paul explains that the Old Covenant, with its laws and rituals, was a temporary measure, pointing forward to the ultimate revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul uses the metaphor of a guardian or tutor to describe the Old Testament law, saying, "So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we

are no longer under a guardian" (Galatians 3:24-25). This idea reinforces the belief that the New Covenant, established through Christ, replaces the older, more limited covenant with a new relationship based on grace, freedom, and love.

2.3. A New Way of Relating to God and Each Other

For New Covenant Christians, both Jesus and Paul present a radically different way of understanding how humans relate to God and each other. The New Covenant is based not on strict adherence to laws, rules, and rituals but on a personal relationship with God through Jesus, grounded in faith and expressed through love. The violent stories of the Old Testament, like the binding of Isaac, which emphasize obedience at all costs, seem incongruous with this new way of relating to God.

In the New Covenant, believers are called to follow Jesus' example of sacrificial love, forgiveness, and peacemaking. Rather than focusing on fear of punishment or divine wrath, New Covenant Christians emphasize God's mercy, compassion, and desire for reconciliation. Jesus' teaching to love one's enemies (Matthew 5:44) and Paul's call to "live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18) reflect this shift toward a focus on nonviolence and reconciliation, which can be difficult to reconcile with the harshness of some Old Testament stories.

In summary, New Covenant Christianity prioritizes the message of Jesus and Paul, seeing their teachings as the culmination and fulfillment of the Old Testament. By focusing on love, grace, and faith as the core elements of the Christian life, New Covenant Christians seek to live in a way that reflects the God revealed in Jesus—merciful, compassionate, and focused on peace rather than violence or strict adherence to ancient laws. This emphasis helps to explain why some New Covenant Christians reject or reinterpret Old Testament stories like the binding of Isaac, seeing them as inconsistent with the God they know through the New Covenant.

3. Rejecting Old Testament Violence

For many *New Covenant Christians*, the violent stories found in the Old Testament, such as the binding of Isaac, present significant theological and moral

challenges. These stories often depict a God who commands or condones actions that seem incompatible with the loving and merciful nature of God as revealed through Jesus Christ. As a result, some New Covenant Christians reject or reinterpret these violent passages, seeing them as either allegorical, symbolic, or contextual, rather than literal commands from God. In their view, such stories may reflect an earlier, incomplete understanding of God's nature, which has been fully revealed in the New Covenant through Jesus' message of love, peace, and nonviolence.

3.1. Allegorical and Contextual Readings of Violent Stories

Many New Covenant Christians approach violent Old Testament narratives by interpreting them allegorically or symbolically rather than as literal historical events. This method allows them to retain the value of these stories without endorsing the violence or harshness that seems to conflict with the teachings of Jesus. The binding of Isaac, for example, can be seen not as a literal divine command for child sacrifice, but as an allegory for faith, trust, and the ultimate rejection of human sacrifice.

In this reading, the story of Isaac's near-sacrifice is not about God requiring violence or testing Abraham's obedience through cruelty. Instead, it becomes a symbolic narrative that highlights Abraham's deep trust in God, while also pointing to God's ultimate provision of life over death. Some New Covenant Christians may interpret the ram provided in Isaac's place as a foreshadowing of Jesus, the "Lamb of God," whose sacrifice would fulfill all requirements of atonement and end the need for further sacrifice. This interpretation shifts the focus away from violence and toward God's plan for redemption through Jesus.

In the broader context of the Old Testament, stories of war, divine punishment, and strict legal codes are often seen as reflective of the cultural and historical circumstances in which they were written. New Covenant Christians might argue that these narratives were shaped by the ancient worldview of the Israelites, who were living in a harsh, tribal context where violence and warfare were common means of survival. As such, these stories reflect the human struggle to understand God's will within the limitations of their cultural and historical reality. By recognizing this context, modern Christians can see these stories as part of a

gradual revelation of God's nature, culminating in the life and teachings of Jesus, who brought a message of peace and reconciliation.

3.2. Common Arguments for Rejecting Violent Passages

New Covenant Christians often present several arguments for rejecting or de-emphasizing violent passages in the Old Testament. One of the most common arguments is that the Old Testament reflects a *pre-Christian understanding of God*. In this view, the ancient Israelites were on a journey of discovering who God is, and their understanding was limited by their time, culture, and circumstances. The violent actions attributed to God in the Old Testament, such as commanding wars or enforcing harsh punishments, are seen as expressions of this incomplete understanding, rather than the final revelation of God's character.

According to this argument, the full revelation of God's nature comes only in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus' life and teachings, particularly his emphasis on love, mercy, and forgiveness, reveal the true heart of God, which may not have been fully understood by the ancient Israelites. As such, New Covenant Christians focus on the Gospels and the New Testament as the most authoritative source for understanding God's will, while the Old Testament is viewed as an important but incomplete precursor to the New Covenant.

Another common argument is that the Old Testament's emphasis on law, ritual, and punishment is superseded by the New Covenant's focus on grace, forgiveness, and freedom. Paul's writings, particularly in letters like *Galatians* and *Romans*, emphasize that the Mosaic Law was a temporary measure meant to guide humanity until the coming of Christ (Galatians 3:24-25). Under the New Covenant, believers are no longer bound by the legalistic and punitive aspects of the Old Testament. Instead, they are called to live by the "law of love," which fulfills all the commandments (Romans 13:8-10). From this perspective, the violent and harsh laws of the Old Testament are seen as irrelevant for Christians who live under the grace of the New Covenant.

A third argument involves the idea that violent passages in the Old Testament were not meant to be universally prescriptive, but were specific to the time and circumstances of ancient Israel. Stories of conquest, like those in the Book of Joshua, where God commands the Israelites to destroy entire cities, are seen as specific to Israel's history and not as ongoing mandates for believers today. New

Covenant Christians may interpret these stories as reflections of ancient warfare rather than timeless moral imperatives. They focus instead on the overarching narrative of Scripture, which points toward God's desire for peace, justice, and reconciliation.

3.3. Reinterpreting Old Testament Violence: Spiritual Lessons Over Literal Readings

New Covenant Christians often reinterpret Old Testament stories to emphasize their spiritual or symbolic meaning, rather than focusing on the literal details of violence or punishment. For example, the story of Isaac's near-sacrifice can be reinterpreted as a spiritual lesson about faith, trust, and the nature of God's provision. Rather than focusing on the disturbing image of a father preparing to kill his son, New Covenant Christians might focus on the deeper meaning of the story—how Abraham's faith led to God's ultimate provision and how the story prefigures the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, where God provides his Son for the redemption of humanity.

In the case of stories like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19) or the plagues of Egypt (Exodus 7-12), New Covenant Christians might shift the focus away from the violence and instead highlight the themes of justice, mercy, and God's desire to bring people to repentance. These stories can be seen as cautionary tales about the consequences of persistent injustice and sin, but they are not necessarily endorsements of divine violence. Instead, they point to God's ultimate desire for humanity to live in harmony with His will, and they serve as warnings about the dangers of turning away from God's guidance.

Another example is the story of the conquest of Canaan, where God commands the Israelites to destroy the inhabitants of the land (Joshua 6-12). Some New Covenant Christians interpret this story allegorically, seeing it as a representation of the spiritual battle against sin, rather than a literal endorsement of genocide. The Canaanites, in this view, represent the sinful tendencies and forces that believers must overcome in their own lives. The call to "destroy" the Canaanites becomes a metaphor for the call to eradicate sin and idolatry from one's heart, rather than a justification for violence against others.

By focusing on the spiritual lessons embedded in these stories, New Covenant Christians can find value in the Old Testament without being bound by its violent

or troubling details. They see the Old Testament as a complex, evolving narrative that ultimately points to the revelation of God's love and grace in Jesus Christ. In this way, they are able to honor the Old Testament's role in the story of salvation while prioritizing the teachings of Jesus as the clearest and fullest expression of God's will.

3.4. Conclusion: A Reimagined Understanding of Scripture

For New Covenant Christians, rejecting or reinterpreting Old Testament violence is not about dismissing Scripture, but about understanding it in light of the New Covenant established by Jesus. They view the violent stories of the Old Testament as part of a larger narrative that leads to the revelation of God's true nature in the New Testament. By focusing on the life, teachings, and sacrifice of Jesus, New Covenant Christians prioritize love, peace, and grace as the foundation of their faith, while seeing the Old Testament as a preparatory stage in humanity's journey toward a fuller understanding of God.

In rejecting or reinterpreting violent passages, these Christians seek to live in accordance with the God revealed in Jesus—a God who desires mercy rather than sacrifice, and who calls His followers to love their enemies, forgive those who wrong them, and live in peace with all. This approach allows New Covenant Christians to navigate the complexities of Scripture while remaining faithful to the core message of love and grace that defines the New Covenant.

4. How Jesus and Paul Shape New Covenant Faith

The teachings of Jesus and Paul are central to New Covenant Christianity, emphasizing love, grace, and nonviolence in ways that often contrast with the violence and legalism of the Old Testament. For New Covenant Christians, the words and actions of Jesus, along with the theological insights of Paul, represent the fulfillment of God's plan for humanity, establishing a new and deeper covenant based on love rather than sacrifice and law. The message they convey guides believers toward a faith that prioritizes compassion, forgiveness, and peace, shaping the moral and spiritual framework for living out the New Covenant.

4.1. The Teachings of Jesus: Love, Peacemaking, and Forgiveness

At the heart of Jesus' teachings is a radical call to love, which often directly contrasts with the violence and retributive justice found in the Old Testament. One of the most powerful examples of this is the *Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5-7), where Jesus redefines many aspects of the Old Testament law, calling his followers to a higher standard of righteousness—one that is rooted in love and mercy rather than strict legalism or retaliation.

In Matthew 5:38-39, Jesus addresses the Old Testament principle of *lex talionis*, or "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" (Exodus 21:24), which was intended to limit vengeance to equal retribution. However, Jesus overturns this principle of reciprocal violence, telling his followers, "But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also." This teaching directly opposes the idea of retaliatory justice and encourages nonviolent resistance and forgiveness. By calling for love in response to violence, Jesus sets a new moral and ethical standard for his followers, one that contrasts sharply with the more punitive elements of the Old Testament.

Similarly, in Matthew 5:43-44, Jesus commands, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." This radical call to love one's enemies is perhaps one of the most defining features of New Covenant faith. It directly challenges the Old Testament's depictions of warfare, conquest, and divine judgment against enemies, offering instead a vision of God's kingdom where love triumphs over hate and forgiveness over retribution. For New Covenant Christians, this teaching is a cornerstone of their faith, guiding them to reject violence and embrace peacemaking as a way of life.

The *Beatitudes* (Matthew 5:3-12), which open the Sermon on the Mount, also emphasize values that contrast with Old Testament violence. Jesus blesses the *peacemakers* (Matthew 5:9), the *meek* (Matthew 5:5), and those who are persecuted for righteousness (Matthew 5:10), underscoring the nonviolent, humble, and compassionate nature of his message. These teachings, which promote peace and selflessness, guide New Covenant Christians away from the more aggressive or violent actions depicted in parts of the Old Testament, and instead inspire a life centered on love and reconciliation.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus further illustrates his commitment to nonviolence and forgiveness during his crucifixion, when he prays, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Despite enduring extreme violence and suffering, Jesus responds with compassion, offering forgiveness to his persecutors. For New Covenant Christians, this act of ultimate grace and love serves as the model for how they are to respond to injustice and violence in their own lives—with forgiveness and nonviolence, rather than retaliation.

4.2. Paul’s Emphasis on the Law of Love and Grace

The apostle Paul’s writings are equally foundational for New Covenant Christians, as he builds upon the teachings of Jesus to articulate a theology that emphasizes grace, love, and freedom from the Old Testament law. Paul’s letters consistently advocate for a faith that is no longer bound by the legal and sacrificial systems of the Old Testament, but is instead based on the transformative power of God’s grace and the law of love.

In *Romans 13:8-10*, Paul succinctly captures the essence of the New Covenant’s moral framework: “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

Paul’s teaching here echoes the words of Jesus and reinforces the idea that love is the supreme moral law under the New Covenant. While the Old Testament law was characterized by a long list of commands and prohibitions, Paul argues that all of these are fulfilled through love. For New Covenant Christians, this teaching represents a dramatic shift from the legalistic system of the Old Testament to a faith centered on relationships—specifically, relationships grounded in love, compassion, and care for others. Paul’s assertion that “love does no harm to a neighbor” directly opposes the violence found in some Old Testament stories and reinforces the New Covenant’s rejection of retributive justice in favor of peace and reconciliation.

Paul also emphasizes the role of *grace* in the New Covenant, arguing that salvation and righteousness come not through works of the law, but through faith

in Jesus Christ. In *Ephesians 2:8-9*, Paul writes, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” This teaching underscores the idea that the sacrificial system of the Old Testament is no longer necessary under the New Covenant, because Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross has fulfilled the need for atonement. For New Covenant Christians, this means that their faith is rooted in the grace of God, not in the observance of laws or rituals. This grace frees them from the cycle of violence, punishment, and sacrifice that characterized much of the Old Testament.

Paul also speaks extensively about the role of the *Holy Spirit* in guiding believers under the New Covenant. In *Galatians 5:22-23*, Paul describes the “fruit of the Spirit” as “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” These qualities, which reflect the character of God as revealed in Jesus, contrast sharply with the violence, judgment, and retribution often associated with the Old Testament. For New Covenant Christians, these “fruits” are the guiding principles for their lives, shaping their faith into one of love, peace, and compassion.

4.3. A Faith Rooted in Love, Compassion, and Nonviolence

Together, the teachings of Jesus and Paul form the foundation of New Covenant Christianity, leading believers toward a faith that is rooted in love, compassion, and nonviolence. The Old Testament’s stories of warfare, divine punishment, and sacrificial rituals are seen as part of a historical context, but they are not the final word on how Christians are to live. Instead, New Covenant Christians view the New Testament as the fullest revelation of God’s will, with Jesus’ and Paul’s teachings providing the moral and ethical framework for their lives.

By focusing on Jesus’ radical message of love for enemies, peacemaking, and forgiveness, and Paul’s emphasis on the law of love and grace, New Covenant Christians are guided away from violence and retribution. They believe that the call to love God and love one’s neighbor is the ultimate commandment, fulfilling the law and shaping their approach to all aspects of life.

In practical terms, this means that New Covenant Christians reject violence as a means of resolving conflict. They strive to follow Jesus’ example of turning the other cheek, loving their enemies, and seeking reconciliation rather than

retaliation. They emphasize forgiveness and grace, believing that these qualities reflect the heart of God's kingdom, where peace and justice prevail.

Moreover, New Covenant Christians often engage in social justice, peacemaking efforts, and acts of mercy, seeing these as natural outflows of the love they are called to live out. Whether through advocating for nonviolent solutions to global conflicts, helping those in need, or working toward reconciliation in fractured relationships, New Covenant Christians seek to embody the love and grace that Jesus and Paul proclaimed.

In conclusion, the teachings of Jesus and Paul are central to New Covenant Christianity, offering a vision of faith that is deeply rooted in love, compassion, and nonviolence. By prioritizing these teachings over the violent narratives of the Old Testament, New Covenant Christians are guided toward a life that reflects the grace of God and the love of Christ, transforming both their relationships with others and their understanding of God's will for humanity.

5. Navigating Scripture: Balancing Reverence and Critical Interpretation

For *New Covenant Christians*, navigating the complex relationship between the Old and New Testaments requires a balance between reverence for the entirety of Scripture and a critical interpretation that prioritizes the teachings of Jesus and the New Covenant. While the Old Testament provides the essential background for understanding Jesus' life, mission, and the fulfillment of God's promises, it also contains narratives and laws that can be difficult to reconcile with the message of love, grace, and nonviolence central to the New Covenant. To honor both the historical significance of the Old Testament and the transformative power of the New Covenant, New Covenant Christians seek ways to engage with the Bible that uphold its spiritual authority while allowing for thoughtful reinterpretation of difficult passages.

5.1. The Old Testament's Importance in Understanding Jesus' Life and Mission

The Old Testament is indispensable in understanding the context of Jesus' life and mission. It contains the foundational stories of creation, the covenant with Abraham, the giving of the law to Moses, and the prophetic visions that shaped the expectations of the Messiah. Without the Old Testament, key aspects of

Jesus' identity—such as being the promised descendant of David (Isaiah 11:1-2) and the fulfillment of prophecies about the suffering servant (Isaiah 53)—would be incomprehensible.

The Old Testament also sets the stage for the *New Covenant* by illustrating humanity's ongoing struggle to live in harmony with God's will. From the fall of Adam and Eve to the rebellion of Israel, the Old Testament presents a narrative of human failure to uphold the law and the need for a new way of relating to God. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are presented in the New Testament as the fulfillment of this need. His arrival inaugurates a new relationship between God and humanity—one based not on adherence to laws and rituals but on grace, forgiveness, and love.

Thus, for New Covenant Christians, the Old Testament is important as the prelude to and preparation for the New Covenant. It provides the historical, theological, and spiritual framework that makes Jesus' life and message comprehensible. However, they believe that Jesus' teachings and the New Covenant ultimately supersede many of the laws, practices, and violent narratives of the Old Testament. This perspective allows them to honor the Old Testament as sacred scripture while also recognizing that its primary value is in pointing toward the more complete revelation of God's will in Jesus Christ.

5.2. Approaching Difficult Passages with Critical Interpretation

One of the challenges New Covenant Christians face is how to approach difficult Old Testament passages, such as the story of Isaac's near-sacrifice, in a way that maintains reverence for scripture while acknowledging that some of these stories seem incompatible with the teachings of Jesus. A common strategy is to interpret these passages through a *Christocentric lens*, meaning that they are viewed in light of Jesus' life and message. This allows difficult narratives to be understood as part of the progressive revelation of God, culminating in the person of Jesus.

For example, the binding of Isaac can be interpreted not as a literal command from God to commit violence but as a test of faith that points toward God's ultimate rejection of human sacrifice. In this reading, God's intervention to stop Abraham from killing Isaac is seen as a precursor to the New Covenant, where God offers his own Son, Jesus, as the ultimate sacrifice for humanity. This allegorical or symbolic approach allows New Covenant Christians to derive

spiritual meaning from the story while distancing it from the violence of its literal interpretation.

Another strategy is to place these difficult passages in their *historical and cultural context*. Many of the violent or legalistic narratives in the Old Testament can be better understood when seen as part of the ancient Near Eastern world in which they were written. In this context, practices such as animal sacrifice, retributive justice, and warfare were common, and the Israelites were not immune to these cultural norms. New Covenant Christians may argue that these stories reflect the limitations of human understanding at that time, and that they should not be viewed as direct models for moral behavior today. Instead, they are part of a larger narrative that ultimately reveals God's desire for peace, justice, and reconciliation, which is fully realized in Jesus.

Typology is another method used to interpret difficult passages. Typology involves seeing Old Testament figures, events, or rituals as *types* or foreshadowings of New Testament realities. For instance, Isaac's near-sacrifice can be seen as a type of Christ, with Isaac representing the willing sacrifice that Jesus would later fulfill. The ram caught in the thicket, which takes Isaac's place, is often interpreted as a symbol of substitutionary atonement, prefiguring Jesus' role as the sacrificial Lamb of God. By viewing Old Testament stories typologically, New Covenant Christians can find deeper spiritual meaning without endorsing the violence or harshness of the literal narrative.

Finally, New Covenant Christians emphasize the importance of approaching these passages with *humility* and a willingness to wrestle with difficult questions. Rather than simply dismissing troubling stories, they are encouraged to engage with them thoughtfully, seeking guidance through prayer, study, and discussion within their faith communities. This approach allows them to remain faithful to the Bible while also acknowledging that not all passages need to be interpreted in a rigid, literalistic manner.

5.3. Faith as a Guide in Navigating Complex Narratives

Faith plays a central role in how New Covenant Christians navigate the complexities of the Bible. While intellectual understanding and critical interpretation are important, they ultimately rely on faith to guide their reading of scripture. Faith allows them to trust that even the most difficult passages are

part of God's larger story of redemption and that the Bible, as a whole, points to the core message of love and salvation through Jesus Christ.

One of the key elements of this faith is the belief that *Jesus is the fullest revelation of God's nature*. New Covenant Christians trust that Jesus' life, teachings, and sacrifice reveal the heart of God more clearly than the incomplete or partial revelations found in earlier scriptures. This belief allows them to interpret difficult Old Testament stories in light of Jesus' message of love, peace, and forgiveness, without feeling the need to harmonize every aspect of the Old and New Testaments.

For example, while the Old Testament may contain stories of war and divine punishment, New Covenant Christians believe that Jesus' command to love one's enemies (Matthew 5:44) represents the truest expression of God's will. This faith in the transformative power of love allows them to focus on the New Covenant's call to nonviolence, reconciliation, and grace, even when confronted with Old Testament narratives that seem to contradict these values.

Another aspect of faith that helps New Covenant Christians navigate scripture is the belief in the *ongoing work of the Holy Spirit*. They trust that the Holy Spirit continues to guide believers in understanding and applying the Bible's teachings in contemporary contexts. This belief allows them to read the Bible not just as an ancient text but as a living word that speaks to their lives today. By relying on the Holy Spirit, they can discern how to interpret difficult passages in ways that align with the core message of love, justice, and redemption.

5.4. Focusing on the Core Message of Love and Redemption

Ultimately, New Covenant Christians navigate scripture by focusing on its core message of love, redemption, and reconciliation. For them, the Bible is not primarily a rulebook or a collection of historical narratives but a story of God's love for humanity and His plan to redeem the world through Jesus Christ. This focus on love and redemption allows them to approach even the most challenging parts of scripture with hope and confidence, knowing that the ultimate message is one of grace and transformation.

The New Testament repeatedly emphasizes that *love* is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:10), and New Covenant Christians view this as the lens through which

all scripture should be interpreted. Stories of violence, judgment, or legalism in the Old Testament are seen as part of a larger narrative that points toward the New Covenant's radical call to love God and love one's neighbor. By focusing on this central theme, they are able to engage with the Bible in a way that is both reverent and transformative.

In conclusion, New Covenant Christians navigate the complexities of scripture by balancing reverence for the Bible's authority with critical interpretation that prioritizes the teachings of Jesus and the New Covenant. They approach difficult Old Testament passages, such as the binding of Isaac, with humility, seeking spiritual lessons rather than literal readings. Their faith in Jesus as the fullest revelation of God's nature and in the guiding work of the Holy Spirit allows them to interpret scripture in ways that align with the New Covenant's message of love, grace, and redemption. By focusing on this core message, New Covenant Christians find hope, guidance, and meaning in the Bible, even when confronted with its most challenging stories.

6. Conclusion: A Faith Rooted in Love

New Covenant Christianity offers a distinctive approach to interpreting Scripture, particularly when it comes to difficult and violent stories from the Old Testament, such as the binding of Isaac. At the heart of this approach is the belief that the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul represent the fullest revelation of God's will, ushering in a new relationship between God and humanity—one that emphasizes love, mercy, and grace over legalism, sacrifice, and violence. For New Covenant Christians, while the Old Testament is an important and sacred part of the Bible, its stories are often reinterpreted through the lens of the New Covenant, which focuses on love and peace rather than retribution or punishment.

The story of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac, which many view as violent or morally problematic, is one example of a passage that New Covenant Christians approach with critical interpretation. Rather than seeing it as a literal command for human sacrifice, they view it as an allegorical or symbolic story that foreshadows God's provision and points toward the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus, through whom God offers redemption to all. This story, along with others that

depict violence or divine judgment, is understood as part of an evolving revelation of God's nature, culminating in the message of Jesus, who calls for love, forgiveness, and peacemaking.

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus teaches that love is the greatest commandment, summing up all of the law and the prophets (Matthew 22:37-40). His radical calls for loving one's enemies, forgiving others, and rejecting violence form the foundation of New Covenant faith. Paul echoes this message in his letters, where he emphasizes the law of love and the transformative power of grace, arguing that believers are no longer bound by the legalistic and sacrificial systems of the Old Testament. Instead, they are called to live in a way that reflects God's love for humanity, extending compassion and forgiveness to others.

For New Covenant Christians, the teachings of Jesus and Paul offer a clear path to a faith that is deeply rooted in love, nonviolence, and mercy. By focusing on these principles, they seek to embody the grace and peace that God desires for His people. The harsh or violent aspects of the Old Testament are not dismissed but are understood within the larger context of a progressive revelation, leading to the ultimate expression of God's will in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As readers reflect on their own faith and relationship with Scripture, New Covenant Christianity encourages them to explore how they interpret the Bible in light of the New Covenant's emphasis on love and grace. Engaging with Scripture in this way invites believers to wrestle with challenging passages, not in a spirit of rejection but with an openness to deeper understanding. It allows for a faith that honors the entire Bible while recognizing that the New Testament reveals a new way of living—one that reflects the heart of God as seen in Jesus.

The transformative power of the New Covenant lies in its ability to take the most difficult aspects of life—violence, sin, brokenness—and redeem them through love, forgiveness, and grace. As Christians continue to explore their own beliefs and approaches to Scripture, they are invited to embrace this redemptive vision of faith, allowing it to shape their lives and their relationships with others. In doing so, they can live out the core message of the New Covenant: a faith rooted in love.

Epilogue: The Binding of Sons—Then and Now

The story of Abraham and Isaac has echoed through the centuries as a tale of faith, obedience, and divine intervention. But as we look more closely, we see that the central element—Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son in the name of faith—reveals a dark parallel that continues to resonate in our world today. Just as Abraham nearly offered Isaac on the altar of obedience, so too, modern fathers may send their sons into the violence of war, often under the banner of patriotism, honor, or duty. In both cases, the underlying forces are strikingly similar: a belief in the necessity of sacrifice and the acceptance of violence as a pathway to something greater. But should these acts of violence, whether ancient or modern, be accepted as noble? Or should they be rejected, just as the New Covenant calls for the rejection of violence in favor of love and mercy?

In the ancient narrative, Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac seems rooted in an unflinching obedience to what he believes to be God's command. Yet, at the critical moment, God intervenes, providing a ram in Isaac's place and sparing the boy from death. For New Covenant Christians, this divine intervention symbolizes a rejection of violence and a foreshadowing of the new relationship between God and humanity—a relationship where sacrifice is no longer necessary, and where love and peace are the ultimate expressions of faith.

In modern times, we see fathers, often driven by a sense of duty or societal expectations, sending their sons off to fight in wars, where violence and death are accepted as inevitable consequences of service to a greater cause. Patriotism, much like Abraham's faith, is held up as a justification for the ultimate sacrifice. Yet, beneath the surface, there is a similar tension. Just as Abraham's story forces us to question the morality of blind obedience, so too must we question the morality of sending young men—and now young women—into the horrors of war, especially in conflicts that may not be just or necessary.

Patriotism, like faith, can be a powerful and noble force. But when it demands violence and bloodshed, we must pause and consider whether we are truly following the higher call of love that Jesus proclaimed. Is it not possible that, just as God provided a way out for Isaac, there is another path for our sons and daughters? A path where violence and death are not inevitable, and where the sacrifice of lives is no longer seen as a noble necessity?

The New Covenant, as revealed in the teachings of Jesus, offers us a clear alternative: love, forgiveness, and peacemaking. Just as Jesus rejected the violence of his time, calling his followers to love their enemies and turn the other cheek, so too are we called to reject the cycles of violence that continue to plague our world. Whether it is the ancient sacrifice of Isaac or the modern sacrifice of young soldiers, the underlying truth remains: violence is not the path to redemption.

In both stories, fathers—whether Abraham or a modern patriot—are faced with difficult choices, caught between societal or divine expectations and the love they have for their sons. But the New Covenant invites us to a different choice. It calls us to reject the violence that so often accompanies blind faith or patriotism and instead embrace the radical message of love, peace, and nonviolence that Jesus lived and died for.

As we reflect on these parallels, may we find the courage to question the narratives that glorify sacrifice and violence, whether in ancient texts or modern nationalistic fervor. And may we choose, instead, a faith rooted in love—a love that protects life, seeks peace, and rejects violence, no matter how noble the cause may seem.

The binding of sons, both ancient and modern, must end. The altar of violence must be dismantled. For in the New Covenant, there is no place for sacrifice, only for love and the peace it brings.

References

- *The Holy Bible: New International Version.* Zondervan, 2011.
  (Primary source for references to Genesis 22, Matthew 5-7, Romans 13:8-10, and other scriptural passages).
- Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination.* Fortress Press, 1978.
  (A key text for understanding the prophetic role of Scripture and its call for justice, providing context for reinterpreting Old Testament narratives).
- Dunn, James D.G. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle.* Eerdmans, 1998.
  (A scholarly examination of Paul's emphasis on love and grace, essential for understanding the New Covenant perspective).
- Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics.* HarperOne, 1996.
  (Hays' work explores the ethical teachings of Jesus and Paul, focusing on themes of nonviolence, forgiveness, and love).
- Wright, N.T. *Jesus and the Victory of God.* Fortress Press, 1996.
  (Wright's historical and theological study of Jesus' life and mission, providing insight into how his message fulfills Old Testament promises).
- Longman III, Tremper. *Reading the Bible with Heart and Mind.* NavPress, 1997.
  (An accessible guide on interpreting difficult Bible passages with both reverence and critical thought).
- Yoder, John Howard. *The Politics of Jesus.* Eerdmans, 1994.
  (Yoder's work focuses on Jesus' radical message of nonviolence and how it contrasts with the violence in many Old Testament stories).

These references provide a foundation for understanding how New Covenant Christians reconcile the violent stories of the Old Testament with the message of Jesus and Paul, emphasizing love, grace, and nonviolence.